

Caring about wildlife and childlife



Photos by **Scott Terrell** / Skagit Valley Herald

The Kulshan Community Bird and Butterfly Garden in Mount Vernon was the site of a public celebration on Aug. 26 recognizing the Skagit Valley as a certified Community Wildlife Habitat through the National Wildlife Federation.

Stop for just a moment and look around outside.

Nothing new or unusual, you may say. But that's the point: Our vibrant, verdant and wildlife-abundant valley is a natural habitat.

Now, the National Wildlife Federation has made it official. The Skagit Valley was certified in August as a Community Wildlife Habitat — just the 45th in the entire United States.



Skagit Conservation District District Manager Carolyn Kelly walks with her granddaughter Elizabeth Kelly, 4, through the Kulshan Community Bird and Butterfly Garden on Aug. 26 in Mount Vernon.

By **KATHY BOYD**
Features writer

The valley became one of only 10 other communities in Washington state with a similar designation during a public celebration, held between afternoon rain showers Aug. 26, at the Kulshan Community Bird and Butterfly Garden in north-

east Mount Vernon.

Kristi Carpenter, with the Skagit Conservation District, said a group of community volunteers called the Skagit Valley Backyard Wildlife Habitat Team led the certification

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project in partnership with the conservation district and the National Wildlife Federation. Their effort has taken three years to accomplish.

Carpenter said the project started in June 2007 and was supported by the Skagit County commissioners and officials from the city of Mount Vernon.

"We're a small team, probably one of the smallest in the country," said Donna Schram, chair of the Skagit Valley volunteers. "It took hundreds and hundreds of hours to make this happen."

Schram said the designated habitat area comprises about 250 square miles and includes all of Mount Vernon, Conway, Edison, Bow, Clear Lake and La Conner.

But the certification process is complex, she said. There are different requirements in the number of homes, churches and other institutions that must become certified habitat

sites prior to a larger area becoming eligible for community certification.

Each certified site must incorporate four requirements, Schram said — food, water, shelter and a home (place to raise young).

Team members conducted tours, workshops, presentations, helped with restoration projects and worked with families and children. She said Carpenter came up with the idea of building fairy houses as a children's educational tool to demonstrate the habitat concepts.

As a result, nearly 200 home yards within the Skagit Valley have been certified. In addition, five businesses, eight school grounds, two church grounds, and 10 parks have been certified through the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife habitat program.

She said the newly restored garden in the Kulshan community where the celebration was held reflected her team's aim to enhance habitat for wildlife

and wildlife.

"It's just a gem," she said of the project. "A lot of the neighborhood kids helped with the restoration. It's not just pretty, it's pretty with a function. We have butterflies, birds, deer, snakes — they are all welcome."

National Wildlife Federation spokesperson Roxanne Paul, in a news release, commended the Skagit Valley residents and the habitat team for creating "a community where people and wildlife can flourish."

"At a time when communities are faced with the problems of losing habitat to development, Skagit Valley stands out as a model for other communities to emulate," Paul said.

The National Wildlife Federation has focused since 1973 on making the nation more wildlife friendly. Paul said the NWF has provided millions of people with the basic landscaping guidelines. Now there are more than 134,000 certified individual habitats nation-

wide. Of those, 5,979 are in Washington state, and 455 in Skagit County.

So what is the benefit of the new designation?

"It's more symbolic than tangible," she said. "It's recognition of a community that cares about maintaining habitat for wildlife and, in our view, wildlife. It recognizes that a community is practicing good stewardship with practices that are in harmony with nature."

"There are so few posi-

tive things we can do to ensure good habitat for living creatures. This is one," she said. "It serves as encouragement for other people to do the same."

Schram said her team looks to Fidalgo as an example. The Fidalgo Community Wildlife Habitat was certified in August 2008, the fourth in the state. Now the team behind it has branched out into other worthwhile programs, such as Skagit Beat the Heat

with the Eat Your Yard and Community Gardens projects, she said.

"Our activities are more apt to involve children, getting them out of doors," Schram said.

They might take on the Kulshan Trail. "It's a wonderful natural corridor, but needs work to improve it," she said. "To have that intentionally designed for people and wildlife would be wonderful."

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